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ABSTRACT

This report draws on data from the 1996 and 1998 National Youth Gang Surveys to compare the characteristics of gangs and gang members in jurisdictions with later onset of gang problems with those of gangs and gang members with earlier onset of gang problems. The survey asked respondents from law enforcement agencies to describe when gangs began to pose a problem in their jurisdiction. All of the resulting data are unweighted and do not represent national estimates. Findings indicate that recently formed gangs may not fit the stereotype of traditional gangs in cities with chronic gang problems. Gangs in jurisdictions with later onset of gang problems tend to have younger members, a much larger proportion of Caucasian and African American members, and a slightly larger proportion of female members than do their counterparts in jurisdictions with earlier onset of gang problems. Modern-day gangs are also less involved in violent crimes and drug trafficking than are their predecessors. (Contains 30 references.) (SM)

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JUVENILE JUSTICE BULLETIN

Modern-Day Youth Gangs

James C. Howell, Arlen Egley, Jr., and Debra K. Gleason

The proliferation of youth gangs since 1980 has fueled the public's fear and magnified possible misconceptions about youth gangs. To address the mounting concern about youth gangs, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP's) Youth Gang Series delves into many of the key issues related to youth gangs. The series considers issues such as gang migration, gang growth, female involvement with gangs, homicide, drugs and violence, and the needs of communities and youth who live in the presence of youth gangs.

From the time their presence was first noted in the United States, youth gangs[1] have been most prevalent in the central cities of large urban areas. Historically, gang members have been primarily young adult males from homogeneous lower-class, inner-city, ghetto or barrio neighborhoods (Klein, 1995; Miller, 1992; Moore, 1978, 1991; Spergel, 1995). Traditionally, gangs have been racially/ethnically segregated and have been actively involved in a variety of criminal activities, including drug trafficking. The spread of gangs beyond central cities in the 1980s and 1990s (Miller, 2001; National Youth Gang Center [NYGC], 1999a, 1999b, 2000) raises the question of whether the newer gangs forming in cities, small towns, and suburban and rural areas are different from the traditional inner-city gangs, as has been suggested by Curry (1999); Howell and Gleason (1999); Howell, Moore, and Egley (2001); and Starbuck, Howell, and Lindquist (2001).

Background and Data Source

The 1996 National Youth Gang Survey[2] (NYGC, 1999a) asked respondents who reported the presence of a youth gang problem: "In approximately what year did gangs begin to pose a problem in your jurisdiction?" The average year of onset[3] was 1989 for larger cities (populations of 25,000 or more), 1990 for suburban counties, 1992 for smaller cities, and 1993 for rural counties. Of course, a number of jurisdictions said their gang problem began much earlier—84 jurisdictions (including 63 larger cities) said their gang problem began before 1981, and 72 (including 54 larger cities) said their problem began between 1981 and 1985. Of all jurisdictions that responded to the year-of-onset question in 1996, 53 percent reported onset during 1991–96 (20 percent in 1991–92, 25 percent in 1993–94, and 8 percent in 1995–96), 33 percent during 1986–90, 6 percent during 1981–85, and 8 percent before 1981.

The analysis reported in this Bulletin compares the characteristics of gangs and gang members in jurisdictions with

A Message From OJJDP

From the time that youth gangs first came to public prominence in the United States, they have been associated with inner-city neighborhoods in major cities such as Chicago or Los Angeles.

The more recent proliferation of gangs into less traditional areas—smaller cities, towns, suburbs, and even rural communities—has led experts to question whether modern-day youth gangs differ significantly from their predecessors.

Drawing on data from the 1996 and 1998 National Youth Gang Surveys, the authors of this Bulletin compare the characteristics of gangs and gang members in jurisdictions with later onset of gang problems with those of gangs and gang members in jurisdictions with earlier onset of gang problems.

Their findings provide interesting insights into variations in gang problems based on time of onset. For example, gangs in jurisdictions with later onset of gang problems tend to have younger members and a larger proportion of Caucasian and African American members than their counterparts in jurisdictions with earlier onset of gang problems. Modern-day gangs are also less involved in violent crimes and drug trafficking than their predecessors.

The data reviewed in this Bulletin reveal systematic differences between communities with earlier and later onset gang problems. These differences have important implications for responding to the challenges that gangs pose to our Nation.

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Table 1: Year of Gang Problem Onset, by Population Size, 1996 Survey

Population Size	Percentage of Jurisdictions Reporting Onset of Gang Problems						
	Before 1981	1981–85	1986–90	1991–92	1993–94	1995–96	All Periods
250,000 or more (*n*=86)	21	14	38	12	11	5	100
100,000–249,999 (*n*=155)	14	12	43	16	13	3	100
50,000–99,999 (*n*=279)	9	7	38	22	18	7	100
25,000–49,999 (*n*=382)	4	5	30	24	29	8	100
10,000–24,999 (*n*=123)	2	2	20	21	42	13	100
Less than 10,000 (*n*=96)	4	2	18	13	42	22	100

Note: Percentages within each population size category may not total 100 because of rounding.

later (1991–96) versus earlier (before 1991) onset of gang problems. Where appropriate, comparisons are also made between jurisdictions with latest (1995–96) and earliest (before 1981) onset. All of the data are unweighted and thus do not represent national estimates.[4]

Findings

Population Size and Area Type

Table 1 compares the onset of gang problems by population size and shows that later onset is more common in less populated jurisdictions. Nearly three-fourths (73 percent) of cities with populations of 250,000 or more reported onset of gang problems before 1991. A majority (54 percent) of jurisdictions with populations between 50,000 and 99,999 reported onset during 1986–90 or earlier. In contrast, a large majority (61 percent) of jurisdictions with populations between 25,000 and 49,999 reported onset during 1991–92 or later. Jurisdictions with populations of less than 25,000 were especially likely to report onset during 1993–96; nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of the smallest jurisdictions (less than 10,000 population) reported onset of gang problems during this period.

Table 2 compares the onset of gang problems by area type: larger cities, smaller cities, suburban counties, and rural counties. A majority of larger cities (55 percent) reported onset of gang problems before 1991, whereas majorities of smaller cities (73 percent), suburban counties (61 percent), and rural counties (82 percent) reported onset during 1991 or later. Rural counties tended to have the latest onset of gang problems, with a majority (65 percent) reporting onset during 1993–96. A smaller majority (51 percent) of smaller cities reported onset during 1993–96. Compared with rural counties and smaller cities, suburban counties tended to have slightly earlier onset of gang problems, with the majority (52 percent) reporting onset during 1991–94.

Demographic Characteristics

Age, gender, and race/ethnicity. Tables 3, 4, and 5 show the age, gender, and racial/ethnic composition of gangs by year of gang problem onset.[5] Compared with gangs in earlier onset jurisdictions, gangs in later onset jurisdictions tended to have younger members, a slightly larger proportion of female members, and a much larger proportion of Caucasian and African American members.

As shown in table 3, gangs in later onset jurisdictions had about the same proportion of younger members (younger than age 15) as gangs in earlier onset jurisdictions, a much larger proportion of members ages 15–17, and a much smaller proportion of older members (18 or older). Thus, gangs in later onset jurisdictions included a greater proportion of juveniles (i.e., individuals younger than age 18). This finding is especially evident when comparing the earliest (before 1981) and latest (1995–96) onset jurisdictions.

As shown in table 4, females represented a much smaller proportion of gang members than males, regardless of when a jurisdiction's gang problem began. However, jurisdictions with the latest onset of gang problems (1995–96) had the largest proportion of female gang members (14 percent)—2 to 4 percent greater than the female proportion for other onset groups.

Table 2: Year of Gang Problem Onset, by Area Type, 1996 Survey

Area Type*	Percentage of Jurisdictions Reporting Onset of Gang Problems						
	Before 1981	1981–85	1986–90	1991–92	1993–94	1995–96	All Periods
Larger city (*n*=669)	9	8	38	20	18	6	100
Smaller city (*n*=79)	5	3	20	22	32	19	100
Suburban county (*n*=265)	6	6	28	20	32	9	100
Rural county (*n*=108)	2	1	16	17	46	19	100

Note: Percentages within each population size category may not total 100 because of rounding.

* Larger cities are those with populations of 25,000 or more. Smaller cities are those with populations between 2,500 and 24,999.

Table 3: Age of Gang Members, by Year of Gang Problem Onset, 1996 Survey

Year of Onset	Average Percentage of Gang Members			
	Under age 15	Age 15–17	Age 18–24	Over age 24
Before 1981 (*n*=78)	21	38	31	10
1981–85 (*n*=56)	20	41	31	9
1986–90 (*n*=303)	21	45	29	6
1991–92 (*n*=195)	21	47	27	5
1993–94 (*n*=224)	24	47	26	3
1995–96 (*n*=74)	22	54	23	1

Note: Percentages within each onset category may not total 100 because of rounding. In tables 3–5, the number of jurisdictions (*n*) varies because some respondents did not answer all of the survey's demographic questions. The percentages listed were estimated by reporting jurisdictions.

Table 4: Gender of Gang Members, by Year of Gang Problem Onset, 1996 Survey

Year of Onset	Average Percentage of Gang Members	
	Male	Female
Before 1981 (*n*=79)	90	10
1981–85 (*n*=64)	89	11
1986–90 (*n*=337)	89	11
1991–92 (*n*=202)	90	10
1993–94 (*n*=247)	88	12
1995–96 (*n*=75)	86	14

Note: In tables 3–5, the number of jurisdictions (*n*) varies because some respondents did not answer all of the survey's demographic questions. The percentages listed were estimated by reporting jurisdictions.

Table 5: Race/Ethnicity of Gang Members, by Year of Gang Problem Onset, 1996 Survey

Year of Onset	Average Percentage of Gang Members				
	African American	Hispanic	Asian	Caucasian	Other
Before 1981 (*n*=75)	21	58	7	10	3
1981–85 (*n*=62)	34	44	5	15	2
1986–90 (*n*=319)	35	34	7	24	1
1991–92 (*n*=198)	32	23	6	37	2
1993–94 (*n*=251)	30	23	5	39	2
1995–96 (*n*=80)	36	16	3	40	4

Note: Percentages within each onset category may not total 100 because of rounding. In tables 3–5, the number of jurisdictions (*n*) varies because some respondents did not answer all of the survey's demographic questions. The percentages listed were estimated by reporting jurisdictions.

As shown in table 5, racial/ethnic differences between gangs in later versus earlier onset jurisdictions were even more extreme than age differences. In jurisdictions with onset before 1981, a majority of gang members were Hispanic (58 percent). In contrast, in the later onset jurisdictions (1991 and later), Caucasians were the predominant group, followed by African Americans.

Multiethnic/multiracial gangs. The 1996 survey asked: "What percentage of the gangs in your jurisdiction are multiethnic or multiracial?" As shown in table 6, earlier onset jurisdictions reported a much smaller proportion of racially mixed gangs than later onset jurisdictions. Such gangs represented about one-third (32 percent) of all gangs in jurisdictions with onset before 1981, compared with more than half (56 percent) in jurisdictions with onset during 1991–92, 50 percent in those with 1993–94 onset, and 40 percent in those with 1995–96 onset.

In a more specific question, the 1998 survey asked respondents to estimate the percentage of gangs in their jurisdictions with a "significant mixture of two or more racial/ethnic groups." Table 6 shows that such gangs were far more prevalent in later onset jurisdictions than in earlier onset jurisdictions. Only 18 percent of the gangs in jurisdictions with onset before 1981 had a significant racial/ethnic mixture, in contrast with 55 percent in jurisdictions with 1991–92 onset, 48 percent in those with 1993–94 onset, and 47 percent in those with 1995–96 onset. As in the 1996 survey, gangs with a significant multiethnic/multiracial mixture were most commonly reported in jurisdictions with onset of gang problems in 1991–92.

Criminal Involvement

Firearms. The 1998 survey asked agencies to estimate how frequently gang members in their jurisdictions used firearms in assault crimes: "often," "sometimes," "rarely," or "not at all." More than half of all respondents (53 percent) said gang members used firearms often or sometimes. As shown in figure 1, firearm use by gang members in assault crimes was much less common in later onset jurisdictions than in earlier onset jurisdictions. A large majority (84 percent) of agencies in the earliest onset group (before 1981) reported that gangs often or sometimes

Table 6: Presence of Racially/Ethnically Mixed Gangs, by Year of Gang Problem Onset, 1996 and 1998 Surveys

	Jurisdictions Reporting Mixed Gangs				Average Percentage of Mixed Gangs Reported	
	Number		Percent			
Year of Onset*	1996	1998	1996	1998	1996	1998
Before 1981	56	29	88	52	32	18
1981–85	47	41	80	75	45	38
1986–90	268	212	89	83	49	44
1991–92	145	103	88	82	56	55
1993–94	176	106	85	75	50	48
1995–96	44	31	75	78	40	47

Note: In 1996, respondents were asked "What percentage of the gangs in your jurisdiction are multiethnic or multiracial?" In 1998, respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of gangs in their jurisdictions with a "significant mixture of two or more racial/ethnic groups."

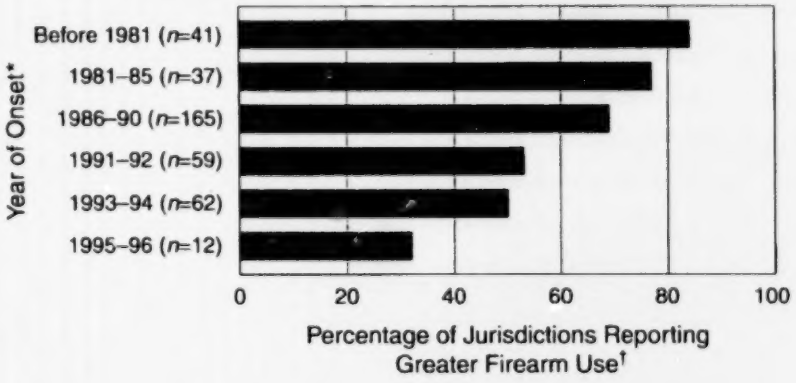
* Because 1998 survey respondents were not asked when their gang problems began, the classification of 1998 respondents by onset category is based on 1996 responses to the year-of-onset question.

used firearms in assault crimes, compared with only 32 percent of agencies in the latest onset group (1995–96)—a difference of 52 percent.

Drug trafficking. The 1996 survey asked respondents to estimate the percentage of drug sales in their jurisdictions that involved gang members and the proportion of drug distribution that was controlled or managed by gangs. As shown in table 7, the average share of drug sales involving gang members was 45 percent for the earliest onset jurisdictions (before 1981) and 35 percent for the latest onset jurisdictions (1995–96)—a difference of 10 percent. The same comparison for gang control of drug distribution shows a 30-percent difference between the earliest and latest onset groups (41 percent and 11 percent, respectively). Thus, both gang member involvement in drug sales and gang control of drug distribution were lower in the late-onset localities, but the difference was much greater for the latter measure. In other words, gangs in late-onset localities were, relatively speaking, less involved in drug distribution than in drug sales.

The 1998 survey asked respondents to estimate the percentage of gang members in their jurisdictions who were involved in drug sales. As shown in table 7, the earliest onset jurisdictions reported an average of 83 percent of gang members involved in drug sales, compared with an average of 65 percent for the latest onset jurisdictions—a difference of 18 percent.

Figure 1: Firearm Use in Assault Crimes by Gangs, by Year of Gang Problem Onset, 1998 Survey



* Because 1998 survey respondents were not asked when their gang problems began, the classification of 1998 respondents by onset category is based on 1996 responses to the year-of-onset question.

† Combined response for use "often" and "sometimes."

Homicides. The 1998 survey also asked respondents to report the number of gang-related homicides in their jurisdictions. Figure 2 shows the percentage of jurisdictions in each gang problem onset period reporting no gang-related homicides, one or two such homicides, and three or more. The patterns for the number of gang homicides relative to gang problem onset period were most consistent in jurisdictions reporting either no homicides or three or more homicides. One-third (35 percent) of jurisdictions with gang problem onset before 1981 had no gang homicides. With one exception, this proportion consistently increased over the onset periods to 85 percent in the latest period (1995–96)—a difference of 50 percent between the earliest and latest periods. Conversely, the proportion of jurisdictions with three or more gang homicides decreased overall from 40 percent in the earliest onset period to only 4 percent in the latest onset period—a difference of 36 percent. The pattern was somewhat less consistent for jurisdictions reporting one or two gang-related homicides.

Although the proportion of jurisdictions reporting one or two homicides decreased between the earliest and latest onset periods, the proportion is slightly larger for jurisdictions with onset during 1986–90 than for those with onset before 1981 or during 1981–85 and is also slightly larger for those with onset during 1993–94 than for those with onset during 1991–92. In general, however, gang-related homicides

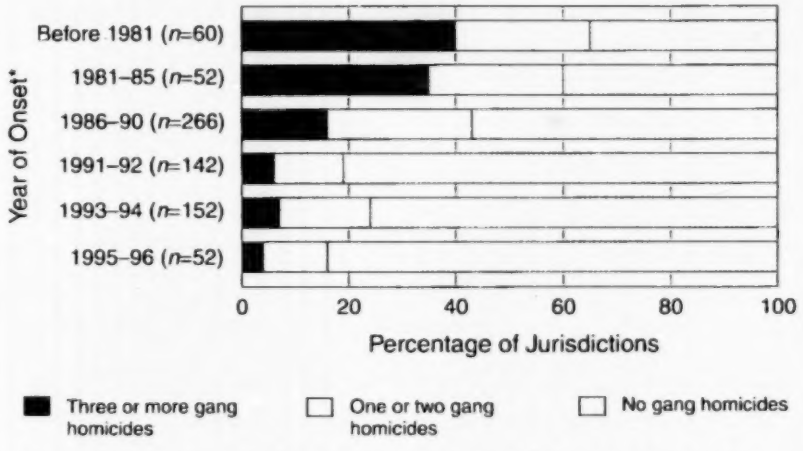
Table 7: Gang Involvement in Drug Trafficking, by Year of Gang Problem Onset, 1996 and 1998 Surveys

	1996			1998	
		Jurisdictions Reporting Majority Control of Drug Distribution by Gangs		Jurisdictions Reporting Greater Involvement of Gang Members in Drug Sales	
Year of Onset*	Average Percentage of Drug Sales Involving Gang Members	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Before 1981	45 (*n*=69)	76	41	43	83
1981–85	48 (*n*=60)	63	48	34	73
1986–90	47 (*n*=278)	314	37	190	81
1991–92	43 (*n*=162)	185	26	72	64
1993–94	41 (*n*=220)	235	24	89	71
1995–96	35 (*n*=52)	73	11	26	65

Note: In 1996, respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of drug sales in their jurisdictions that involved gang members and the proportion of drug distribution that was controlled or managed by gangs (for the second question, the values in the table reflect a combined response for "more than half" and "all"). In 1998, respondents were asked to estimate the proportion of gang members involved in drug sales (the values in the table reflect a combined response for "some" and "most/all").

* Because 1998 survey respondents were not asked when their gang problems began, the classification of 1998 respondents by onset category is based on 1996 responses to the year-of-onset question.

Figure 2: Gang-Related Homicides, by Year of Gang Problem Onset, 1998 Survey



* Because 1998 survey respondents were not asked when their gang problems began, the classification of 1998 respondents by onset category is based on 1996 responses to the year-of-onset question.

were far less prevalent in jurisdictions with later onset of gang problems than in jurisdictions with earlier onset.

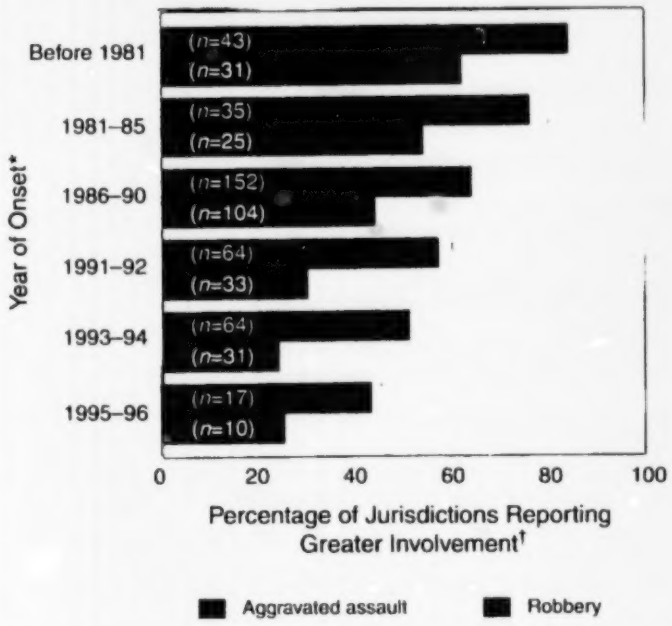
Other crimes. The 1998 survey asked what proportions of gang members were involved in aggravated assault, robbery, larceny/theft, burglary/breaking and entering, and motor vehicle theft: "most/all" (75–100 percent), "some" (26–74 percent), "few" (1–25 percent), or "none" (0 percent). Figure 3 shows that the percentage of agencies reporting involvement of most/all or some gang members in the two violent crimes (aggravated assault and robbery) in 1998 was consistently lower in the latest onset jurisdictions than in the earliest onset jurisdictions—a difference of 41 percent for aggravated assault and 37 percent for robbery. However, as shown in figure 4, a different pattern emerges for property crimes (larceny/theft, burglary/breaking and entering, and motor vehicle theft). Compared with the earliest onset jurisdictions, the percentage of latest onset jurisdictions reporting involvement of most/all or some gang members was 38 percent lower for motor vehicle theft but 5 percent higher for burglary/breaking and entering and 4 percent higher for larceny/theft.

Thus, the 1998 crime measures indicate that gang members in the latest onset jurisdictions were most likely to be involved in burglary/breaking and entering and larceny/theft. Involvement of most/all or some gang members in these two property offenses was reported by 63 and 73 percent of the latest onset jurisdictions, respectively. Fewer than half of the latest onset jurisdictions reported similar levels of involvement for the other three criminal activities measured.

Summary and Discussion

Law enforcement agency responses to the National Youth Gang Survey regarding the year of onset of gang problems revealed a cascading pattern (of earlier to later onset) from the largest to the smallest localities

Figure 3: Gang Member Involvement in Selected Violent Crimes, by Year of Gang Problem Onset, 1998 Survey



* Because 1998 survey respondents were not asked when their gang problems began, the classification of 1998 respondents by onset category is based on 1996 responses to the year-of-onset question.

† The survey asked respondents about the proportion of gang members involved in each crime. The data in the figure represent combined responses for "most/all" and "some."

and from urban to rural areas. The analysis reported in this Bulletin contrasts gangs in earlier and later onset jurisdictions. As observed by law enforcement agencies, gangs in newer gang problem jurisdictions were qualitatively different from traditional gangs in jurisdictions where gang problems began much earlier. Gangs in the late-onset jurisdictions had younger members, slightly more females, and more of a racial/ethnic mixture; were less involved in drug trafficking; and were less involved in violent crimes, including homicides. The later onset jurisdictions were most likely to be in rural counties, smaller cities, and suburban counties with populations of less than 50,000.

Although Caucasians were the predominant racial/ethnic group in later onset (1991 or later) localities, racial/ethnic mixing may be a defining characteristic of such gangs. In the 1998 National Youth Gang Survey (NYGC, 2000), respondents estimated that the membership of more than one-third of their gangs consisted of a significant mixture of two or more racial/ethnic groups. Smaller cities had the largest proportion of these mixed gangs (54 percent of all gangs in smaller cities), followed by suburban counties (45 percent), and rural counties (42 percent). Larger cities had the smallest proportion of mixed gangs (32 percent). Another study—an 11-city survey conducted by Esbensen and colleagues (1999)—found that gender mixing also was common: 92 percent of eighth grade gang members said that both boys and girls belonged to their gangs. It is interesting to note that the overwhelming majority of sites from which Esbensen and colleagues drew their sample reported fairly late onset of gang problems (1982–95) in the National Youth Gang Survey.

The National Youth Gang Survey results reported in this Bulletin are particularly striking with respect to gang member involvement in criminal activity. As shown in figures 1–4, gang members in the earliest onset localities not only were involved in property crimes but also were very likely to be involved in violent crimes (homicide, aggravated assault, robbery, and use of firearms). In contrast, gang members in the latest onset localities were most likely to be involved in the property crimes of burglary/breaking and entering and larceny/theft, although they were far less likely to be involved in motor vehicle theft.

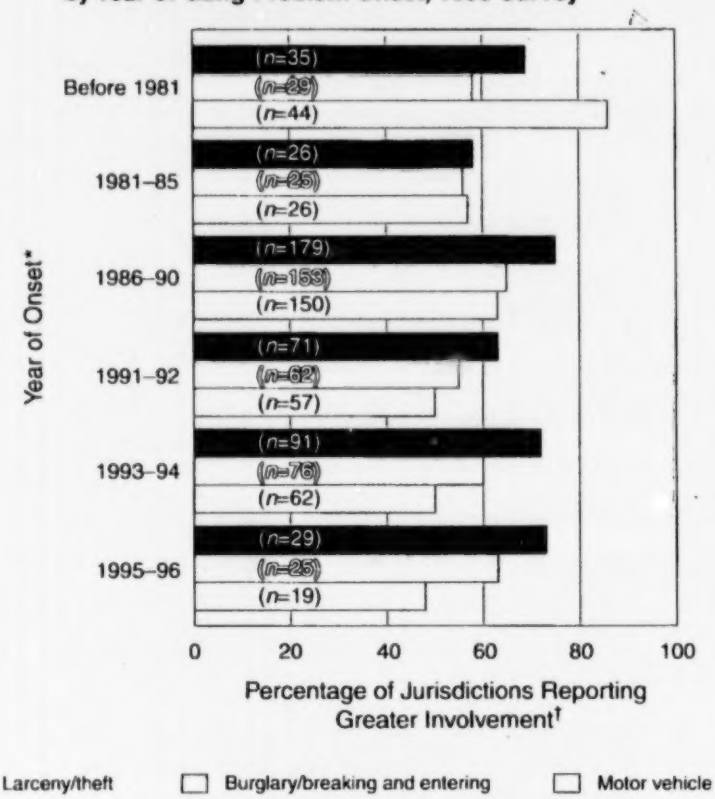
As shown in table 7, gang member involvement in drug trafficking was lower in the later onset jurisdictions than in the earlier onset jurisdictions. However, in the later onset jurisdictions, the level of individual member involvement in drug sales was greater than the overall level of gang control of drug distribution (see also Howell and Gleason, 1999).

It may be that the gangs in the later onset jurisdictions are in the early stages of development, from the standpoint of gang criminal involvement. Gangs in these jurisdictions tended to be far more involved in property crimes and individual drug sales than in violent crimes or drug distribution.

Do gangs move through patterns of offending as they mature? Do they progress from involvement in property crimes to involvement in violent crimes? A few gang studies have produced evidence of this kind of progression (Huff, 1998; Palacios, 1996; Venkatesh, 1996). Studies of gang members also offer evidence that gang involvement increases the likelihood of self-reported violence during adolescence (Esbensen and Huizinga, 1993; Hill et al., 1996; Thornberry et al., 1993). Individuals who belonged to gangs for more than a year were much more likely to be involved in serious and violent offenses than gang members who belonged for a year or less (Hill et al., 1996; Thornberry et al., in press). This finding may be related to the increased bonding of individual members to their gangs (Lynskey et al., 2000). In addition, Curry (2000) found evidence of continuity between being involved in a gang at a young age and having a police record later. The intervention-related implications of these research findings, which suggest that as gangs mature the criminal involvement of their members grows more serious, are discussed below.

David Starbuck (a former supervisor of the Kansas City, MO, Police Department's Gang Unit) and colleagues characterize many of the newer gangs as having a "hybrid" gang culture (Starbuck, Howell, and Lindquist, 2001). By this they mean that many of the gangs that have sprung

Figure 4: Gang Member Involvement in Selected Property Crimes, by Year of Gang Problem Onset, 1998 Survey



* Because 1998 survey respondents were not asked when their gang problems began, the classification of 1998 respondents by onset category is based on 1996 responses to the year-of-onset question.

† The survey asked respondents about the proportion of gang members involved in each crime. The data in the figure represent combined responses for "most/all" and "some."

up relatively recently throughout the country may not follow the same traditional rules or methods of operation as their predecessors from Los Angeles, CA, or Chicago, IL. For example, these newer gangs may adopt symbols from both Chicago- and Los Angeles-based gangs, they may not have an allegiance to a traditional "color," they may change the gang name, members may change their affiliation from one gang to another or belong to more than one gang, and two or more gangs may suddenly merge and form a new gang. Starbuck and colleagues contend that this hybrid gang culture is more prevalent in communities that had no gang problem prior to the 1980s or 1990s.

Program Implications

As documented in this analysis, recently formed gangs may not fit the stereotype of traditional gangs in cities with chronic gang problems. Jurisdictions with relatively recent onset of gang activity need to assess their gang problem carefully. Any community that discovers it has a gang problem should develop a continuum of prevention, intervention, and (if needed) suppression strategies. By taking action as soon as a gang problem is discovered, it may be possible to interrupt the gangs' developmental progression from involvement in general delinquency and property crimes to involvement in serious, violent activities.

A community's gang problem may begin with school-centered gangs, which, according to surveys of students, tend not to be extensively involved in criminal activity (Howell and Lynch, 2000). School-based prevention programs could be particularly useful in countering the further development of such gangs. A long-term evaluation of the Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) program, a school-based prevention curriculum, showed an overall beneficial program effect (Esbensen et al., 2001). In communities that have gangs in the early stages of development, it is especially appropriate for prevention programs and social services agencies to intervene at the individual level with the youngest gang members and other at-risk youth (Curry, 2000). The Gang Intervention Through Targeted Outreach program, operated by Boys & Girls Clubs of America, is a promising intervention initiative (Thornberry and Burch, 1997). Even in the early stages of gang development, communities may determine that some gang suppression activities are needed to protect the public. The Tri-Agency Resource Gang Enforcement Team (TARGET) is a good multijurisdictional model that integrates law enforcement, probation, and prosecution efforts (Capizzi, Cook, and Schumacher, 1995). A combination of such strategies may reduce future involvement of adolescents in gangs and impede the development of embryonic gangs.

The National Youth Gang Center (2001a) has developed a protocol that communities can use in assessing their gang problem. The protocol is applicable to communities of all sizes and characteristics. The National Youth Gang Center (2001b) also has prepared a planning guide to assist communities in developing a plan to implement the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Comprehensive Gang Model. The model addresses the youth gang problem through five interrelated strategies: community mobilization; social intervention, including street outreach; provision of opportunities; suppression/social control; and organizational change and development. Based on research and community experiences, the model is multifaceted and multilayered and involves individual youth, families, the gang structure, agencies, and the community. A menu of promising and effective program options is also available (Howell, 2000).

Starbuck and colleagues stress how important it is for law enforcement agencies—both large and small—to understand the continuing changes in the dynamics of gangs (Starbuck, Howell, and Lindquist, 2001). Thus, it is imperative that law enforcement agencies continually update staff training curriculums and monitor the specific gang culture in their own jurisdictions. In addressing gang problems, law enforcement agencies should keep in mind that no single response will work universally. What succeeds in one city may have little effect in another. Each response must be based on an accurate assessment of the local problem, updated intelligence, application of all community resources, and a realistic appraisal of how to gauge success. It is also essential that local efforts to prevent and combat gangs include every available community agency in a comprehensive approach. Without such an approach, efforts to address gang problems are quite likely to meet with frustration.

Endnotes

1. Throughout this Bulletin, the term "gang" refers to youth gangs.

2. The 1996 National Youth Gang Survey was sent to a sample of 3,024 police and sheriff's departments in October 1997. It consisted of a 14-item questionnaire that elicited information on a variety of gang-associated topics, including drug-related activity (see NYGC, 2000). This sample, which has been surveyed annually, includes the following: (1) all police departments serving cities with populations of 25,000 or more, (2) a randomly selected sample of police departments serving cities with populations between 2,500 and 24,999, (3) all suburban county police and sheriff's departments, and (4) a randomly selected sample of rural county police and sheriff's departments. See *1996 National Youth Gang Survey* (NYGC, 1999a) for detailed information on sample selection, survey methodology, and results of analyses. The response rate for the 1996 survey was 87 percent. Of the 2,629 jurisdictions that responded to the survey, 1,385 (53 percent) reported gang problems. Among these, 1,121 agencies responded to the question regarding the year in which their jurisdiction's gang problem began. These 1,121 respondents to the 1996 survey are the primary basis for the analyses in this Bulletin. To present the most current information, pertinent data from the 1998 survey also are analyzed, where appropriate. The response rate for the 1998 survey was 88 percent, and 48 percent of the responding jurisdictions reported gang problems.

3. In this Bulletin, "onset" refers to the year in which a jurisdiction's gang problem began. A total of 81 percent of the 1996 survey respondents who reported a gang problem answered the year-of-onset question. Because 1998 survey respondents were not asked when their gang problems began, analyses of 1998 data use 1996 responses to the year-of-onset question to classify respondents by onset.

4. Because this analysis focuses on identifying differences in gang characteristics in different jurisdictions given various onset periods (rather than on generating gang prevalence data), the use of weighted data was not deemed appropriate.

5. In tables 3–5, the number of respondents varies for the demographic variables because some respondents did not answer all of the demographic questions. The analysis of demographic characteristics is based on data from the 1996 survey. Analysis of data from the 1998 survey, with year-of-onset classification based on responses to the 1996 survey (see endnote 3), yielded comparable results, which are not presented here.

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National Youth Gang Center

As part of its comprehensive, coordinated response to America's gang problem, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) funds the National Youth Gang Center (NYGC). NYGC assists State and local jurisdictions in the collection, analysis, and exchange of information on gang-related demographics, legislation, literature, research, and promising program strategies. NYGC coordinates activities of the OJJDP Gang Consortium, a group of Federal agencies, gang program representatives, and service providers that works to coordinate gang information and programs. NYGC also provides training and technical assistance for OJJDP's Rural Gang, Gang-Free Schools, and Gang-Free Communities Initiatives. For more information, contact:

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Related Reading

Selected OJJDP publications related to youth gangs are listed below. To view or download the publications online, go to OJJDP's Web site at ojjdp.ncjrs.org/pubs/fact.html#gangs (for Fact Sheets) or ojjdp.ncjrs.org/pubs/gang.html (for all other publications). Publications may also be ordered from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse at 800–638–8736, 410–792–4358 (fax), or puborder.ncjrs.org.

A comprehensive bibliography of gang literature is available online at ojjdp.ncjrs.org/resources/youthgangBib2001new.html.

A Comprehensive Response to America's Youth Gang Problem (Fact Sheet). March 1997. 2 pp. FS 9640. Presents an overview of OJJDP's response to gang problems.

Early Precursors of Gang Membership: A Study of Seattle Youth (Youth Gang Series Bulletin). December 2001. 6 pp. NCJ 190106. Analyzes Seattle Social Development Project data on the relationship between risk factors present at ages 10 to 12 and the likelihood of joining a gang between ages 13 and 18.

Female Gangs: A Focus on Research (Youth Gang Series Bulletin). March 2001. 12 pp. NCJ 186159. Summarizes past and present research on female gangs and tracks the rise in the number of female gangs and the increased public recognition of female gang involvement as a significant social problem.

Gang Members and Delinquent Behavior (Youth Development Series Bulletin). June 1997. 6 pp. NCJ 165154. Presents findings from the Rochester Youth Development Study concerning what portion of delinquency in American society can be attributed to gang members.

Gang Members on the Move (Youth Gang Series Bulletin). October 1998. NCJ 171153. Examines whether gang migration has been a major influence in the proliferation of gangs.

Gang Membership, Delinquent Peers, and Delinquent Behavior (Youth Gang Series Bulletin). October 1998. NCJ 171119. Describes the findings of OJJDP-funded longitudinal studies of juveniles in Seattle, WA, and Rochester, NY, addressing the question of whether gang membership contributes to delinquency above and beyond the influence of associating with delinquent peers.

The Growth of Youth Gang Problems in the United States: 1970–98 (Report). April 2001. 148 pp. NCJ 181868. Presents a comprehensive study of the growth of youth gang problems in the United States from 1970 to 1998.

Highlights of the 1999 National Youth Gang Survey (Fact Sheet). November 2000. 2 pp. FS 200020. Presents key findings of the 1999 National Youth Gang Survey, which is the fifth annual gang survey conducted by the National Youth Gang Center. Similar Fact Sheets are also available for the 1995–98 surveys.

Hybrid and Other Modern Gangs (Youth Gang Series Bulletin). December 2001. 8 pp. NCJ 189916. Focuses on the nature of hybrid gangs, whose customs are clearly distinguished from the practices of more traditional gangs, and draws on survey data, research findings, and field reports to detail these critical differences.

Implementing the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model (Fact Sheet). July 1999. 2 pp. FS 99112. Provides a preview of gang intervention projects in five demonstration sites (Mesa, AZ; Tucson, AZ; Riverside, CA; Bloomington, IL; and San Antonio, TX) implementing the OJJDP Comprehensive Gang Model to reduce gang crime and violence.

National Youth Gang Center (Fact Sheet). August 1995. 2 pp. FS 9528. Presents an overview of the OJJDP-funded National Youth Gang Center's mission and activities.

1998 National Youth Gang Survey (Summary). November 2000. 84 pp. NCJ 183109. Presents detailed findings of the 1998 National Youth Gang Survey, including statistics on number and locations of gangs, member demographics, gang involvement in crime and drugs, and antigang task force activity. Similar publications are also available for the 1995–97 surveys.

Preventing Adolescent Gang Involvement (Youth Gang Series Bulletin). September 2000. 12 pp. NCJ 182210. Provides information on the history of American youth gangs, current knowledge about gangs, research examining risk factors associated with gang membership, and prevention and intervention strategies and programs.

Vietnamese Youth Gang Involvement (Fact Sheet). February 2000. 2 pp. FS 200001. Summarizes findings from a study of factors related to gang involvement by Vietnamese American youth.

Youth Gang Homicides in the 1990's (Fact Sheet). March 2001. 2 pp. FS 200103. Discusses the results of a study of youth gang homicides in U.S. cities in the 1990s, which was conducted by OJJDP's National Youth Gang Center.

Youth Gang Programs and Strategies (Summary). August 2000. 96 pp. NCJ 171154. Describes programs and strategies used to disrupt gangs and divert youth from them, discusses related evaluations and national assessments, and provides information to assist practitioners and administrators in designing and implementing such programs and strategies.

Youth Gang Drug Trafficking (Youth Gang Series Bulletin). December 1999. 12 pp. NCJ 178282. Presents nationally representative data on the extent and nature of youth gang involvement in drug trafficking, based on results from the 1996 National Youth Gang Survey.

Youth Gangs: An Overview (Youth Gang Series Bulletin). August 1998. 20 pp. NCJ 167249. Provides an overview of the problems that youth gangs pose, identifies the differences between youth gangs and adult criminal organizations, examines the risk factors that lead to youth gang membership, and presents promising strategies being used to curb youth gang involvement.

Youth Gangs (Fact Sheet). December 1997. 2 pp. FS 9772. Presents an overview of gang-related facts and issues.

The Youth Gangs, Drugs, and Violence Connection (Youth Gang Series Bulletin). January 1999. 12 pp. NCJ 171152. Examines the interrelationship of youth gangs, drugs, and violence.

Youth Gangs in Schools (Youth Gang Series Bulletin). August 2000. 8 pp. NCJ 183015. Analyzes gang-related data from the 1995 School Crime Supplements, including information on characteristics of gangs in schools, reasons for greater gang prevalence in some schools, and the impact of gangs on victimization at school.

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